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Opening Address

Senator O'Laughlin, President Pro Tem

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Good afternoon, Senators, distinguished guests, and fellow Missourians.

Thank you. After a year as your President Pro Tem, I remain humbled and honored to serve in this role. This year has reminded me what is great about our state. It has also challenged us to make state government reflect the values of Missouri' s hardworking men and women.

So I ask this. Is Missouri state government meeting the challenges before us? Is it encouraging and supporting what makes us stronger and more prosperous? Or is it undermining our independence, our opportunities, our safety, and our future prosperity?

As I enter my last year in the Senate, I want to challenge all of state government to focus on basic priorities. We must be good stewards of the tax dollars hardworking families entrust to us. We must also create a business climate that provides family-supporting jobs and better opportunities for all Missourians.

Taxes, regulations, red tape, and bureaucracy do not make Missouri better. In every case, they take from Missouri families. They also take from Missouri small businesses and farms. Our job is to reduce their impact. We must make sure what we take is as limited as possible. We must also ensure it achieves important objectives and serves the common good of Missourians.

Missourians want results. They want better roads and better schools. They want more private homeownership. They want safe streets and neighborhoods. They want better jobs and stronger job skills. They want thriving communities. And they want less dependence on government at any level. These are the priorities Missourians expect the Missouri Senate to focus on. Our policies must reflect them. Our spending must align with them.

To support these goals, we must be persistent. We must closely examine the ideas we turn into laws. We must also scrutinize how we spend the budget we distribute. When we act on behalf of the people of this state, it should match their priorities.

The dollars we spend, the programs we run, and the policies we enact must improve the lives of Missouri families. We should also think about the next generation. For children born this year and beyond, what will they inherit? Will they inherit a state government that supports their health and safety? Will it create hope and opportunity, no matter their status, their zip code, the school they attend, or whether their families can give them the love and support they need? Can Missouri promise that to these new citizens?

We must be there for them. Not to replace their parents. But as a community, we must build institutions that protect children from harm. We must help stabilize families and support them when needed. We must give children access to education and knowledge. We must also build critical thinking and practical skills so they can one day support themselves and their families.

I believe we can do better. I believe we can be a better resource and a better partner. Our goal should be greater opportunity for Missouri families and children than the generations before them. If we do that, we will help ensure Missouri is a great place to work, raise a family, and build a business.

We will do this together. And we will do it earnestly.

Missourians deserve tangible results. They deserve measurable outcomes. They also deserve transparency from state government.

State government has never taken more from its citizens. Over the last five years, Missouri's overall budget has grown by 40 percent. During that same time, wage growth has been modest, at about 3 to 4 percent per year. State spending increased at two to three times the rate of record-high inflation. That kind of government largess is unsustainable. It is also harmful.

So in this new year, let's focus on priorities. Let's support our families. Let's demand better results. And let's find solutions that move Missouri forward.

I refuse to measure the Missouri Senate by the number of bills we pass. I will measure it by the quality of what we pass. I will also measure it by the impact it has on the lives of our fellow citizens. I invite all of my colleagues from both sides of the aisle to participate in achieving these goals. Our state is better off when we consider all perspectives and work to find common ground.

All Missourians—young and old—need to know this. The Missouri Senate has not given up on the American dream. We have not given up on the Missouri dream. And our work this year will be focused on making a safer and more prosperous Missouri dream a reality.

Thank you.